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ABSTRACT

Procedures and rationales for teacher appraisal are examined. The target-output model calls for agreed-upon objectives to be compared with professional work. The performance criteria model compares professional work to agreed criteria of competencies. A diagnostic model of appraisal of teacher needs and potentials is joined with the others in a "product" model of appraisal of the result generated. A "process model" has more relevance for professional work as it views professional development in the process of teaching, in stimulating learning by the teacher. In approaching the problem of government appraisal of a profession, an "action-research" model is proposed to deal with enhancement of teachers' professionalism, leaving aspects of promotion and response to incompetence to separate initiatives. (SLD)

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"Problems in Teacher Appraisal - An Action-Research Solution?"

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(Policy Issues and Research Issues)

by

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Summary

Contradictions in teacher appraisal proposals:

contrasting purposes, the balance between opportunity and threat

Some models of appraisal:

the target output model

the performance criteria model

the diagnostic model

The product model of appraisal - a bureaucratic principle

The process model of appraisal - the professional principle

Action-research: a specification of the process model of appraisal

(to be kept separate from separate initiatives for:

promotion procedures

remedial and disciplinary procedures)

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by Richard Winter

INTRODUCTION - CONTRADICTIONS IN TEACHER APPRAISAL

The DES has responded to criticisms of its proposals concerning teacher appraisal with some degree of self-righteousness:

"In the course of their daily work, teachers appraise their pupils continuously...Yet by comparison with other professions, teachers have been slow to accept the need to appraise each other and themselves... It would be strange if a profession which is dedicated to drawing out the full potential of the young decided to neglect this means of developing both the individual members and the collective potential of the profession."

(Hancock, 1985, paras 21-2)

Clearly, Hancock, Permanent Secretary at the DES, thinks there is a contradiction here. But what, where, and whose is it? Keith Joseph, referring to what he suggested was "the fundamental quality" required by teacher appraisal, reminded teachers:

"It takes moral courage to admit that you can do better...(to) face up to our weaknesses and seek others' guidance and help in overcoming them".

(Joseph, 1986, p.10)

Is "moral courage" really the issue between the Secretary of State and the teaching profession? Presumably not; but if not, what is?

To begin answering these questions, let us look at the different forms of benefit which the DES expects to result from a teacher appraisal scheme. First:

"(It would) help all teachers realise their full professional potential by providing them with better job satisfaction, more appropriate in-service training, and better planned career development."

(Joseph, 1985, para 44)

That this is a key passage is suggested by the fact that the Secretary of State repeated it in a later speech (Joseph, 1986, p.9), as did Angela Rumbold (Rumbold, 1986, p.4). Rumbold continued:

"We want to encourage teachers and help them to work to the best of their ability, to review their job, what they do and how to do it better, to build on their strengths."

(Rumbold, 1986, p.7)

In similar vein, Hancock suggests that appraisal aims "to keep alive (teachers' sense of purpose and zest for the job." (Hancock, 1985, para 22).

Why, then, the opposition from the teacher unions, which the DES bemoans? The answer is not hard to find. Another aim of a teacher appraisal system will be to provide "employers" with "accurate knowledge of each teacher's performance" as part of a set of arrangements for "effective staff management" (Hancock, 1985, paras 4 & 6). "Staff management" here means not only decisions concerning appropriate INSET and career development, but also concerning the "deployment" of teachers (ACAS, 1986, para 3) and the response to teachers "experiencing performance difficulty". In this context "appraisal records" would provide "relevant information" for "disciplinary procedures" (ACAS, 1986, para 3 v).

Already then we can see a profound ambivalence built in to the aims of the proposed appraisal scheme. The DES-commissioned Suffolk report spells it out:

"Clearly, the appraisal process must assist teachers in their career development and can help them acquire the skills and experience to further their aspirations...(but) The scheme must enable teachers whose performance falls below par to be identified so that steps can be taken by the school and LEA to rectify the situation and, exceptionally, to terminate employment."

(Suffolk LEA, 1985, p.4)

The opening quotations from Hancock and Joseph can thus be seen as - at best - one-sided. The moral qualities needed to admit to one's own shortcomings are of a different order from those involved in a response to some-one else's decision that one's performance is below par. And teachers know that their appraisals of learners may indeed be part of "drawing out full potential" but may also be the documentary justification of "failure". In other words, there is a potential threat within the appraisal process proposed, namely the threat contained within the central contradiction of schooling itself. At school, learners develop their individual potential, but they are also authoritatively graded for differential rewards. For different learners the balance between these two is very different, and it is on this balance that their motivation ("zest" or otherwise) depends.

The same will be true for teachers in relation to appraisal. Hancock stresses that appraisal should be seen not as a threat but as a series of opportunities (Hancock, 1985, para 7), but it is clear that the threat is just as real as the opportunities: it all depends on what sort of process is envisaged

If the details of the process do not allay the sense of threat, teachers will respond to appraisal with the same mixture of anxiety, resentment, cynicism, and anger as a low-achieving fifth-former facing a CSE examination. And just as for some pupils school assessments are an ineffective ritual, the Suffolk report warns:

"There is some evidence to show that staff appraisal can degenerate into a paper exercise in which worthless reports are compiled and filed simply to comply with procedural instructions."

(Suffolk LEA, 1985, p.6)

Let us then look at some of the procedures and rationales envisaged for teacher appraisal, and consider how far they are likely to offer opportunities to develop professional skills and thus to enhance "zest for the job", and how far they are likely to pose the threat of negative evaluation, that well-known "turn-off" for learners of any age, in any context.

SOME MODELS OF THE APPRAISAL PROCESS

1) The Target Output Model

The procedure here is that a set of objectives is agreed with a teacher, whose professional work is then compared with those objectives. (See Joseph, 1986, p.12; ACAS, 1986, p.4) The objectives may be derived from a job description or from attainment targets for learners (Delaney, 1986, p.77). Appraisal thus takes the form of "measuring" how far targets have been achieved. The process, clearly derived from commercial models, involves teachers in a commitment to a sort of productivity contract. It could be termed a "quota-fulfilment" model.

However, the problem with teachers' "objectives" is that they are both highly specific (to this learner in this lesson) and highly mysterious (internal to the emotional and cognitive processes of learners). Attempts to express objectives in a general and public form usually leads to an idealistic vagueness: whereby any practical evaluative function is lost, since the judgements at issue are side-stepped. The following, for example, is an extract from an "appraisal instrument" presented to the "Better Schools - Evaluation and Appraisal" Conference:

"Organization should show evidence of:

good classroom organization, and appropriate arrangements of space, resources, and time...

creativity and enthusiasm for own curriculum area...

the demonstration of a well-balanced curriculum..."

(Taylor, 1986, p.105)

To attempt to negotiate an "objective" appraisal around such targets seems destined to end either in contentious semantics or a paper exercise. Perhaps it is to avoid such problems that we have seen the proposed introduction of national attainment tests (albeit stoutly denied by Keith Joseph in 1985 (Joseph, 1985, para 19)). Only by means of testing pupils can targets for educational processes be manipulated in the same way as the targets for the other types of organization, from which this model of appraisal is derived. But then, of course, the balance between opportunity and threat would be decisively tilted towards threat. Consequently, in order to manage this threat, teachers can be expected to preserve the required harmony between target and output by focussing on the negative aspects of their professional situation, and especially on the "low ability" or the "poor background" of their pupils. A process less likely to stimulate the development of professional zest or skill could hardly be imagined! And this is doubly ironic, since the DES themselves point out, in Better Schools, that unsatisfactory standards are closely linked with teachers' underestimation of pupils' capacities (DES, 1985, p.6). Appraisal by means of target pupil attainments would reinforce such behaviour, except in the case of teachers addicted to bidding seven no-trumps without a picture card in sight.

2) The Performance Criteria Model

In this model, teaching is conceived as a skill-based performance, analysable into a list of constituent "competencies" represented by observable "indicators" or criteria. In relation to this list of competencies, the judgement is made as to "whether teachers satisfy the agreed criteria" (DES, 1986, p.71). In their presentation of this model, entitled "Techniques for Appraising Teacher Performance", the DES gives an example of such a list, including:

"Competency VII - Communicates with Learners"

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| Indicator 4 | Gives directions and explanations related to lesson content... |
| " 6 | Uses responses and questions from learners in teaching |
| " 7 | Provides feedback to learners throughout the lesson |
| " 8 | Uses acceptable written and oral expression with learners." |

(DES, 1986, p.75)

The complete two-page list of such "objective" indicators of adequate performance has a formal resemblance to an MOT checklist of criteria for vehicular adequacy,

but with a crucial difference: the criteria listed always need further criteria before they can be utilized. Sometimes this is implicitly recognized (We can easily see that we will have to discuss and agree the meaning of "acceptable" - Indicator 8) but usually this problem is disguised by the adoption of "value-free" phrasing. (For example, "Not like that, you oaf" would actually seem to match up to Indicator 7).

The point is that, as the writer of the DES contribution says: "Research has not unearthed any simple or comprehensive indicator of effective teaching performance" (DES, 1986, p.70). Hence, as the Suffolk report argues, attempts to "measure" teachers' performance with any precision are highly questionable (Suffolk LEA, 1985, p.2). And in the absence of reliable and effective criteria, professional development along these lines is more likely to be inhibited than supported by the provision of checklists which are "objective" only because they are vacuous. Further, the use of such dubious "instruments" for an assessment process (rather than as a preliminary agenda to stimulate open-ended critical discussion) is likely to render such assessments both implausible and also threatening - because it will be recognized that, in the end, they cannot but be arbitrary.

3) The Diagnostic Model

According to the ACAS Appraisal and Training Working Group's "Agreed Principles" (ACAS, 1986, para 3), diagnosis of "potential" will enable

"individual teachers, their head teachers and their employers to see when a new or modified assignment would help the professional development of individual teachers and improve their career prospects." (Para 3 iii)

On the other hand, a diagnosis that a teacher is "experiencing difficulty" will lead to "help...guidance, counselling, and training" and - possibly - "disciplinary procedures" (Para 3 v). Quite apart from the threat of dismissal, quite explicit in the literature, "diagnosis" always cuts both ways: teachers will not welcome being diagnosed as not having potential for a particular career step. It is for this reason, presumably, that diagnosis is to be linked with "classroom observation" (ACAS, 1986, para 7 iii),

carried out by a superior, (ACAS, 1986, para 5) so that contentious judgements as to need, potential, or merit can be adjudicated in the light of "evidence". There is thus no doubt that diagnosis of need and potential could be experienced as ~~threatening~~, especially as part of a universal scheme of appraisal. For example, teachers whose deeply held educational philosophy leads them to adopt a particular teaching style may fear that an appraisal observation by a superior ~~holding~~ opposed views could trigger a "guidance and counselling" procedure which would be at best unwelcome and at worst could lead - who knows where! And, given the current economic differentials - coupled with a widespread ideology of success-as-promotion, it would be hard for all concerned to act on a diagnosis that - say - a head-of-department needed a couple of years' respite from administrative responsibility in order to straighten out aspects of his or her own teaching. In other words, certain beneficial forms of "new or modified assignment" would be ruled out by the link between "career" (as a series of professional experiences) and a hierarchical salary structure.

THE "PRODUCT" MODEL OF APPRAISAL: A BUREAUCRATIC PRINCIPLE

Although these three "models" are conceptually distinguishable, they are in fact being proposed together as part of a single set of procedures serving a diverse range of purposes. Thus, the St Edmunds scheme is based on job description, professional need, career discussions, standard of classroom performance, curriculum targets, and pupil attainments. (Delaney, 1986, pp.16-7) The diversity of DES aims for appraisal schemes has already been set out. (See pp.1-2, above) But all this is quite surprising, since there is a readily available body of evidence and argument suggesting that a plurality of aims renders appraisal schemes ineffective.

Judith Whyte, for example, in a comprehensive review, cites work from the 60's and 70's as well as the early 80's which concludes that "reward reviews, performance reviews, and potential reviews" should be served by separate procedures, and generally that procedures for evaluation and for

development should not be mixed (Whyte, 1986, p.142). There is nothing surprising about this point: it emerges quite clearly from the consideration, above, of the potential threats present, alongside undoubted "opportunities", in each of the appraisal procedures advocated. The work reviewed by Whyte is given full weight in the Suffolk study, and they conclude:

"A precise definition of the purpose of the appraisal system is an imperative: failure to do this can be not only inhibitory but also downright disastrous." (Suffolk LEA, 1985, p.18)

(Notice that they refer to "the purpose" - singular.)

That the DES also are fully aware that different appraisal procedures are suited to different purposes, is shown in their contribution to the "Better Schools - Evaluation and Appraisal" Conference (DES, 1986): it is noted that self-appraisal and peer-appraisal are most effective for professional improvement, and that pupil attainment and pupil ratings are most effective for the assessment of performance. And yet they place all their emphasis on superordinate appraisal, even while listing half a paragraph of unanswered questions and noting: "The difficulties are evident". (pp.71-3) So, while the DES note the contradiction that teachers are unwilling to submit themselves to a process which they impose on pupils, we can note the contradiction that the DES seems to be impelled to recommend a set of procedures which they know are unlikely to achieve their avowed purposes. How could this be explained?

Underlying all three models outlined above is what could be called a "product model" of appraisal. In other words, the main value of the appraisal process lies in the value of the product which it will generate. This product is, in the first instance, "accurate and up-to-date information on performance in post" (Hancock, 1985, para 6 ii); "a new comprehensive and up-to-date information base on teacher performance for the use of LEA's and governing bodies" (Joseph, 1986, p.14). This information base will then be used to achieve the purposes of appraisal, namely to improve professional "standards" through recommendations as to promotion, remediation, or training.

In the next section I will contrast this "product model" with a "process

model" of appraisal, but first it is worth pondering why the DES should embrace the product model when there are clearly so many queries about the quality and reliability of the information the recommended procedures are likely to generate, quite apart from their inevitably problematic side-effects.

The DES is a bureaucracy. The ancient function of a bureaucracy is to render effective over a wide territory the demands of a central political power (See Poggi, 1978, p.74 ff.). Its effective structure is hierarchical, and its fundamental instrument is information travelling "up" the system, so that "informed" decisions can then travel "down". Hence, in principle, its overriding effort must be to convert the activities over which it has jurisdiction into information which can be filed and thus used (later, and by any official) to justify administrative decisions (See Winter, 1976). Bureaucracies must always be able to justify their decisions, because they spend "public" money, for which they are "accountable". Hence the opening of Better Schools, with its immediate references to "securing the best possible return from...resources" (DES, 1985, p.1), and hence the quaint "value-added" image of the educational process (DES, 1986, p.70; Joseph, 1985, para 43), reminding us that the original bureaucracies were concerned with effective taxation. The DES's emphasis in its appraisal proposals may thus be seen as part of an ancient historical tendency.

THE PROFESSIONAL PRINCIPLE: A "PROCESS" MODEL OF APPRAISAL

But there is another, equally widespread and more recent historical tendency at work - the growth of professions. Whereas bureaucratic workers draw authority for their decisions from above - ultimately from the state, which "gives" their position its powers and duties - professional workers are licensed to practise, on demonstrating their mastery of a body of knowledge. Their "allegiance" is therefore not upwards but downwards - to their clients - and inwards - to the specialism which they practise. Clients' "cases" are complex and unique: they cannot be decided upon by the application of general rules (given from above) but only by the discretionary

interpretation of specialist knowledge in the individual instance. This means that professional workers are continually learning (increasing their knowledge and enhancing their skills) through the actual practice of their profession. Now, although this is in principle the ideal-typical relationship between professional practice and professional knowledge, it is a process which can be inhibited - by low morale, inadequate resourcing, excessive case-load (class-size) etc. And it is for this reason that a "process model" of appraisal has relevance for professional work: to encourage the realization of that process - which is the hallmark of the professional role - of learning more about one's practice through the examination of that practice as it occurs.

In a process model of appraisal, the value resides in the process of carrying it out. It is the process itself which will result in professional development. Any outcomes are unique to the individual practitioner and the specific context. Whereas the product model seeks to generate authoritative ("accurate") assessments of teacher performance (so that learning experiences can be prescribed, subsequently, for the teacher) the process model seeks, in itself, to stimulate effective learning by the teacher. It would not generate "information" about teachers' work, but insight for those teachers themselves to use in improving their work.

We can, at last, return to the contradictions with which we started. The DES's contradiction is that they are a bureaucracy presiding over a profession, and thus haunted by ideals of professional practice and development (hence their references to zest, job satisfaction, and moral courage); and the teachers' contradiction is that they are professional educators operating within a bureaucracy, and thus haunted by fears of bureaucratic regulation and accountability (i.e. by DES references to performance assessment). Both parties may indeed be sincerely seeking to improve the quality of education, but the practical problem is that no single scheme can do justice to both principles. Hence the current conflict and confusion.

An obvious solution would be to set up three separate policy initiatives, rather than one "scheme".

Firstly, we can easily agree that improved promotion procedures are needed. The "Peter Principle" - that people are promoted from one set of tasks to another until it last they reach and become stuck at a set of tasks at which they are incompetent (See Faber, 1980, p.26) - neatly articulates the widespread cynicism concerning current arrangements. One might envisage a "pre-promotion" programme, whereby those aspiring to a particular type of post can a) discuss with experienced holders of that post the skills involved, b) make arrangements to have opportunities to exercise such skills, and c) document their possession of these skills, so that when a post "comes up" they can present a portfolio of materials in support of their case.

Secondly, we might agree that improved procedures are needed to respond (in one way or another) to that minority of teachers whose shortcomings cause frustration for their pupils and embarrassment for their colleagues. This is a sensitive issue, exacerbated by the harshness of current employment and welfare policies: who will blow the whistle on a colleague when it might mean precipitation into wastage and poverty, rather than careful re-training for work more in line with that colleague's abilities. This is a legal, moral, political, and economic nettle which employers and unions must grasp: it cannot be evaded. There is a real lack of moral courage (cf. p. 1 above) entailed in attempting to conceal the difficult decisions involved within a general appraisal scheme in which those decisions will, supposedly, "emerge" from "the system" - at the cost, as I have argued, of a universal anxiety which will render the other purposes of appraisal ineffective.

Once these two issues have been separated out, the way is clear to pursue directly the third purpose of appraisal: the general enhancement of professional commitment and satisfaction, skill and effectiveness. For this purpose I have proposed a process model of appraisal, which will now be

elaborated through a consideration of the nature of educational action-research.

The comparison of outcomes with objectives and the analysis of a complex activity into constitutive elements are merely two (by now rather dated, and always rather ponderous) ways in which a professional worker can adopt an analytical stance towards their practice. There are others: the triangulation of accounts between collaborating colleagues, the critical analysis of tape-recorded sessions, comparative study of two pupils or two classes, etc, etc, etc. The advantage of action-research is its flexibility. Its validity claim is that of fresh and usable insight within the particular context; it seeks contrasts and surprises, which can stimulate learning and innovation; it defines an analytical effort which accompanies professional practice (see p.9, above). Action-research can thus be effective on a small scale, achieving its purposes through intensive work on a small amount of critical evidence.

Of course, it requires preparation, time, and support, but this is envisaged as available for the appraisal schemes:

"A successful appraisal scheme will depend on teachers being properly prepared and trained, and having sufficient time to allocate to the appraisal process." (Joseph, 1985, para 47)

How much is "sufficient" time? Taylor (1986, pp.99-107) reported that for each teacher appraised the time required was (apart from the teacher's contribution) 4 hours by the Head and 4 days by an outside observer. The difference, however is that an action-research approach would not involve "outside" observers, and could thus give relatively more time to the teachers, as well as less to the "superordinate appraiser", who would thus become, as Delaney says, "a helper or co-worker, rather than judge" (Delaney, 1986, p.19).

Collaboration as a principle and as a means for professional development is implied (albeit ambiguously) by Hancock's suggestion that appraisal offers "the opportunity to share professional problems" (Hancock, 1985, para 7 iii). More explicitly, it is proposed both by the Fish Report on provision for special educational needs (Fish, 1985, p.202) and by the Hargreaves Report Improving Secondary Schools (1984, p.106). The latter also notes the power

of effectively planned self-evaluation:

"Self-evaluation...may challenge teachers' assumptions about their classroom practice...Changes and modifications in teaching practice brought about by self-evaluation are likely to be maintained."

(Hargreaves, 1984, p.105)

The urgency of the argument in favour of action-research is demonstrated by a recent report in the TES (Surkes, 1987), which details the long list of possible "performance indicators" which the DES might propose to collect for its "comprehensive information base" - including measures of lateness, attendance and demeanour...There is a vital issue at stake here, concerning the social organization of knowledge, which lies at the heart of what is meant by "educational research". The construction of supposedly "objective information" according to some form of positivist rationale, derived from natural science, embodies the aspiration to understand phenomena by controlling them (See Fay, 1975). The previous arguments have shown how likely it is that this epistemology will fit neatly into DES thinking. The educational research community, however, knows the limitations of positivism as applied to social affairs and can advise the DES accordingly: that "indicators" of social phenomena are always contestable, since they must always rest on a long series of individual interpretive decisions; that general conclusions derived in this way are thus always open to question; that such conclusions, therefore, can only have the most indirect relevance for practice (either at the level of general policy or the individual context); and hence that the vast resources expended in collecting "comprehensive objective information" will nevertheless (in the end) only provide valid justification for quite modest and tentative conjectures. Which may not seem like "value-for-money"....

In contrast to the positivist epistemology which serves the inherent task of bureaucracy, action-research embodies an epistemology which might be termed "practical hermeneutics", and which serves the inherent task of professional work: development through a dialectic between practice and reflection. Elsewhere (Winter, 1987) I have argued at some length that a self-consistent set of methodological principles can be formulated for action-research, and that

action-research can thus begin to resolve many of the ambiguities which otherwise beset social research, so often undermined by the unacknowledged problems in its positivist heritage. My argument here is that action-research's principles and procedures can inform that aspect of the teacher appraisal proposals which is unambiguously concerned with the enhancement of teachers' professionalism, leaving the other aspects to be dealt with separately. It would be a pity if attempts to kill several professional birds with one bureaucratic stone led to the choice of a rough unwieldy boulder, when the shining pebble of widespread school-based professional development lies there before us, waiting to be picked up.

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APPENDIX - TABULAR SUMMARY OF THE ARGUMENT

Model of Appraisal:	PRODUCT	PROCESS
Educational Functions:	Assessment	Learning
Outcomes:	Information	Individualized inservice education
Purposes:	Accountable decision-making	Development of practice
Institutional Principles:	Bureaucracy	Professionalism
Associated Research Modes:	Positivism	Action-Research